

The 2nd International Conference on Integrated Information

School libraries in Greece

Turbulent past, uncertain present, doubtful future

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Abstract

School libraries in Greece are officially established as a separate section of schools; a section that has been functioning in cooperation with schools and supporting them on a regular basis, in a well-organised way, employing its own staff since 1995. However, reports and relevant legislation have appeared since the first half of the 19th century. This paper presents and evaluates the legislation that concerns the establishment and operation of school libraries in Greece from the establishment of the Greek state to the present day. Furthermore, reference is made to the extent the relevant legislation was applied in practice and the method employed for its application; at the same time we do not fail to make a brief reference to the first legislative action taken in relation to school libraries in Europe.

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1. Introduction

“A review of the literature shows that not only is there no comprehensive published history of school libraries², but that school libraries are inadequately covered in the general histories of education and librarianship. Those writers who do discuss the history of school libraries tend to assume that they are a more recent phenomenon than they actually are; indeed, some assume they are a 20th-century development. [...] In addition, as Stott pointed out, both general histories of education and histories of libraries and librarianship failed to provide coverage of the historical development of school libraries. [...] However,] school libraries have existed in schools since at least the 8th century³. These early school libraries would have been very different from school libraries today, just as schools now are very different from their predecessors of earlier centuries.” [2] Moreover,

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² See also the 1st part of Clyde's thesis [1].

³ More specifically, located in York, England [1].

it is true that until the early decades of the 20th century, the operation of school libraries was much less underlined by their *school* character than it is today and they were, in effect, not so closely related to the school's educational and instructive character. This is because until then school libraries were often established for other purposes unrelated (or minimally related) to school instruction, as, for instance, meeting the recreational reading needs of children or the needs of the local community [2].

To be more specific about the time when the first school libraries appeared and refer to the legislation governing them, note that, according to historians studying educational legislation, the first decree related to school libraries was issued in England in 1578 and provided that each school should have a library [2, 3]. "Despite all this, there is considerable evidence for the existence of libraries in schools in England (and in some other European countries) from at least the 8th century; in the United States from the 18th century." [2] When it comes to school libraries in the United States, there is evidence that their development was parallel with that of public libraries and until 1913 the number of working school libraries came to 10.000, but few of them had more than 3.000 volumes/books. However, the first educated school librarian who worked in a school library in the United States appears in 1900 [3].

Consequently, we are initially given the impression that Europe established the legal framework for the foundation (and operation) of school libraries much earlier than the United States. The situation does not appear to be uniform throughout all European countries though, e.g. "the history of school libraries in Dalmatia dates back to the 19th century, when they were established as differentiated and defined subjects within the education system in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. [... More specifically, school] libraries were founded after the adoption of the 1871 Act on Principles of Primary School Education, temporary school and teaching regulation of 1870, and the 1871 Regulations on School Libraries." [4] In Dalmatia, however, they were established "as a tool for the further education of teachers", and not as much as to cover the needs of students. What we should note, however, is that the legal enactment of the operation of school libraries was considered to be part of an effort to modernise the education system [4]. That was the case in almost all countries though.

2. Main part

Let's take a look at the history of school libraries in Greece and the history of the legislation governing them from the establishment of the Greek state onwards⁴. Important libraries are found in Greece since the period of the Turkish occupation; these are connected with intellectuals who supported them offering rich collections of books, mainly hand-written. This is how major libraries were established and operated in modern Greece, such as that of Zagora, Dimitsana, Chios, Kozani and elsewhere [10]. Some of them worked also as school libraries within renowned schools that flourished in the 18th and early 19th centuries (e.g. School libraries started operating in secondary education schools in the Peloponnese during the Turkish occupation [11].) These libraries contributed to the dissemination of the spirit of modern Greek Enlightenment – i.e. to the idea that education is directly related to a nation's conquest of liberty, and also to its general prosperity.

Moving on to the years that marked the establishment of the Greek State, we note that the first governor (since 1827), I. Kapodistrias, gave priority to elementary education and vocational training as part of his effort to help the illiterate and unskilled population. He also established the Library of the Central School (an upper level school comprising three years of studies) in Aegina, an island near Attica. This library was considered to be a school library, but also served a more complex role, since it worked as a reading room, a book distribution centre

⁴ Three (student papers-theses) related to the history of school libraries and the legislation governing them in Greece are those by Papadopoulos [5], Dalakoura & Bota [6] and Koundouraki which was compiled at the Ionian University. The most important relevant paper, however, albeit brief in length, is the one by Papazoglou [7]. Her closing remarks, however, reflect the situation of the school libraries in Greece during the last years of the 20th century, not that of the present day. For a brief review of the Greek books referring to the history in question, see Bikos [8] and Bikos [9]. In the same text, it is also noted – on the basis of evidence – that the three Greek tertiary education institutions where Librarianship is taught have not generally studied school libraries in depth.

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